

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday of Lent
March 15, 2020

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Every year in mid-Lent we break the three-year cycle of readings from the gospels of SS Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We turn our attention to some passages from the Gospel of St John. This is not just to give the Fourth Gospel equal time. Rather, it is in recognition of *the central place* Saint John's Gospel has in the proclamation of the gospel message. At the most important times of year *we turn to John*.

Our Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is a case in point. With graphic details St John memorably records the way eternal life is offered in Jesus Christ. It shows how *we* may come to that life. St John always means more than he says. So pay attention to the conversation between Jesus and the woman. You will see in it an example of the pastoral way Jesus deals with your own soul.

And at the end of the conversation there is one of those graphic touches that can only come from *one who was there*. When the disciples returned, they were surprised Jesus had even been talking to a Samaritan woman. And one of them remarked, "The woman left her water pot." That seems so much like an incidental remark, something with no bearing on the narrative. But in St John's Gospel everything is there for a reason. "The woman left her water pot" means *she meant to come back!* Her leaving the pot at the well was a sign she was coming to faith in Jesus. And we are told what she did. After meeting the Lord, this woman's first impulse was exactly the same as St Andrew's and St Matthew's. She went to her people and told them about Jesus.

The whole encounter put God Incarnate in a happy and expansive mood. He forgot all about physical hunger, the need for food, and the weariness which were stated concerns at the outset of the incident. Rather, Jesus talked about *a different kind of food* and was eloquent in His foretelling of the coming harvest. The disciples were always respectful of their Master. But still they must have thought He had been out in the sun too long! A little bit of sun stroke! But as they listened to the Lord, if they had turned around, they would have seen a line of townspeople already coming out of Sychar and heading for the well *and for Jesus Christ*.

Jesus had not even *talked* to these people! They had only heard about Him second-hand from the Samaritan woman who had less than impeccable credentials. Yet

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God Incarnate saw the first ray of gospel light in their souls. In these people the Lord of History saw the long development of faith that would lead to an everlasting harvest. (It is sad to note these people were the ancestors of the Palestinian Christians who are suffering so terribly now in their homeland, as are Arab Christians throughout the Middle East.) We can only stand in awe of what Jesus knew but did not tell us. But what we *do* know is what St John proclaimed. The Son of God already accepted these Samaritans even at the *outset* of their faith journey, as already being on the way to eternal life.

The trust of Jesus our Lord is magnanimous and regal. It is a challenge to our loyalty to Him. We disappoint Him so often. But we can never consent to betray His absolute confidence in us. In the incident with these souls, coming out of Sychar (which means “city of liars) the Lord was so happy, so triumphant. Here is the first earthly revelation of Christ as *Salvator mundi*, savior of the world.

Our Lord’s treatment of these people strengthens our resolve once again to strive for perfection. St John’s Gospel wants you and me to never forget that like these poor souls streaming out from the city of liars to meet Jesus, we too can cause that joyful smile on the lips of the Saviour as He sees first steps toward faith, and then *counts the harvest certain*.